

Report to the Governor
M. J. “Mike” Foster, Jr.
State of Louisiana

“...to improve the lives of women of all ages in Louisiana...”



Louisiana Women’s Policy and Research Commission
State Representative Diane Winston, Chair
Dr. Beth Willinger, Vice Chair

March 15, 2001



Report to the Governor
Louisiana Women's Policy and Research Commission
March 15, 2001

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Mission, Duties and Focus	2
Request for Feedback	2
Office of Women's Services	3
Findings and Recommendations	4
Issue One: Pay Equity	5
Issue Two: Job Training	6
Issue Three: Child Care	7
Issue Four: Transportation	8
Issue Five: Teenage Pregnancy	9
Issue Six: Women Entrepreneurs	10
Issue Seven: Public Assistance	11
Issue Eight: Health Education	12
Issue Nine: Relationship Violence	13
Issue Ten: Breast and Cervical Cancer	14
Issue Eleven: Sexually Transmitted Diseases	14
Conclusion	15

Introduction

A Louisiana women's commission was first established approximately 30 years ago. Although that commission was not reappointed in 1987, an accomplishment of that commission continues today in the form of the Office of the Governor, Office of Women's Services. A report issued by the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women in 1998, *The Status of Women in Louisiana*, drew the incumbent Governor's attention to the disparity between the status of women in Louisiana relative to women nationwide and to Louisiana men.² At the urging of Senator Paulette Irons (D-New Orleans), Governor M. J. "Mike" Foster, Jr. reestablished the Commission.

- 49th in workforce participation;
- 48th in women's median annual earnings;
- 48th in the ratio of women's to men's earnings; and
- 49th in the percent of women above the poverty line (1995; *The Status of Women in Louisiana*, 1998).

A black and white photograph of two women. The woman on the left has dark, short hair and is wearing a dark sweater. The woman on the right has white, short hair and is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a white collared shirt. They are both smiling and looking at the camera. The woman on the left has her hands resting on the shoulders of the woman on the right.

² Unless otherwise noted, all statistics are from *The Status of Women in Louisiana*, 1998. The national rank is out of a possible 51 including the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Mission, Duties, and Focus

Mission

As advisors to the Governor, our mission is to improve the lives of women of all ages in Louisiana through research, education, and recommendations for legislative and administrative reform.

Duties

The duties of the Commission, as specified in the Executive Order, are:

- to advise the Governor on the particular hardships, concerns, and needs that challenge Louisiana women and their possible solutions;
- to identify and analyze trends that negatively impact the health and prosperity of Louisiana women; and
- to monitor the status of Louisiana women for the purpose of evaluating their economic, educational, and health concerns, needs and/or hardships.

Focus

To achieve our mission, the Commission is seeking greater coordination among the state agencies serving women, maximization of existing resources for women, and use of new and existing resources where they will have the greatest impact on eliminating the economic disparity between the status of women in Louisiana, relative to women nationally and to men in Louisiana.

In the first six months, we have focused on determining the range of existing services and resources for women's economic, education, and health-related concerns. This process will be on-going.

It has become apparent that women's needs, and the programs designed to serve them, are segmented. For example, women's health programs seem to define women's needs in terms of the different stages of reproduction, which may overlook related aspects of women's overall well-being. Educational programs are generally defined by age, such that access can be limited for older women needing remedial or GED programs. Sometimes because of federal regulations and funding, programs that may be needed by the same women are located at different sites, thus adding additional burdens to the application process (i.e., the separation of Medicaid and public assistance programs). Many women require not one, but several services, such as job training, child care assistance, Medicaid, and transportation.

We are of the conviction that it is important to find ways to address the whole woman, all her needs and difficulties in the form of a "one-stop shop" whenever possible.

We also obtained first-hand accounts of how individual Louisiana women experience and address obstacles to their economic and educational advancement and health care needs. The Commission held hearings in early January, 2001, at seven locations throughout the state. Over 350 people attended these hearings and some 250 provided testimony.

Request for Feedback

Following receipt and review of this report by the Governor, the Commission invites the Governor and/or his designee to visit the Commission to relate the Governor's response to the report. Prior to the Commission's next annual and/or scheduled report to the Governor, we invite the Governor and/or his designee to report again to the Commission on the progress of the recommendations.

Office of Women's Services

Women of Louisiana are fortunate to have firmly established the Governor's Office of Women's Services (OWS), a successful state agency serving as a vital resource for women on matters of teen pregnancy, family violence, rape and sexual abuse, education and job training, and programs for unemployed and under-employed heads of households.

OWS is defined as "the official state agency legislatively chartered to advocate for women by assisting the coordination of public (local, state, federal), private, corporate, foundation, non-profit, volunteer, educational, and other organizations providing funding, services, and programs to address the needs of women."

However, there is no central clearing house through which all women can locate and access the existing resources and services already available in Louisiana. Moreover, just as designated liaisons exist in the Governor's office for children's programs and environmental impacts, the Executive Director of OWS is needed as a liaison for women's programs. This is because, in spite of existing programs, women in Louisiana:

- *experience high poverty rates:* 21.3 percent vs. 13.7 percent for women nationally, and the poverty rate for single females with children is 55.5 percent in Louisiana vs. 41.5 percent nationally;
- *lag in pay equity:* women's median annual earnings are ranked 48th nationally, and the ratio of women's to men's earnings stands at 64.4 percent in Louisiana compared to 72.3 percent nationally;
- *lag in educational achievement:* rank 42nd in the percent of women with four or more years of college; and
- *are among the least healthy:* African-American women in Louisiana have age-adjusted mortality rates that substantially exceed those of white women in Louisiana and both groups nationally. In 1995, Louisiana citizens had the 2nd highest incidence of syphilis nationally, 10th highest in gonorrhea, 11th in chlamydia, and the 3rd highest rate of births to teen mothers.

Objective

The Commission aims to make known to Louisiana women the services available to assist them and to provide Louisiana women with an agency able to advocate on their behalf.

Recommendations

Expand the role of OWS to be a centralized clearinghouse, resource, and referral center for all Louisiana women.

Request all state agencies coordinate with and advise OWS on all programs and services affecting women.

- Request that the Louisiana Services Directory, through INFO Louisiana, include "women's services" as one of the main categories under which state services for women can be accessed, including the programs of OWS.

Empower OWS to be a policy advocate on behalf of women's economic self-sufficiency through:

- Serving a more prominent role in overall policy discussions, for example, including the Executive Director in meetings of the undersecretaries and other decision-making bodies;
- Seeking federal funds and grants to support needed programs.

"Until there is more on the job training and programs like the Office of Women's Services and advertising of these services, things will remain the same."

Lafayette displaced homemaker,
Commission hearings, 2001

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the report on The Status of Women in Louisiana, the findings of the public hearings, and other research made available to the Commission, we determined to make this year's recommendations focus on improving women's economic independence by strengthening programs in the following 11 areas:

- Pay equity
- Job Training
- Child Care
- Transportation
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Women Entrepreneurs
- Public Assistance
- Health Education
- Relationship Violence
- Breast and Cervical Cancer
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases



Issue 1: PAY EQUITY

The wage gap between women and men in Louisiana, expressed as the ratio of women's to men's earnings, is the strongest indicator of continuing earnings disadvantages to women in the work force.

Louisiana ranks 48th nationally with women earning just 64.4 cents to each dollar earned by men compared to 72.3 cents for women nationwide (1995).

The reasons for this inequity in pay are numerous but usually result from the segregation of women into traditional female occupations, the payment of lower wages to women, a lack of education or job training, and women's additional responsibilities for children. National statistics show these earnings disadvantages are more severe for women of color. The Status of Women in Louisiana, 1998, furnishes additional statistics on this issue.



Objective

The Commission targets pay equity for Louisiana women as a major avenue to economic self-sufficiency. The aim is to improve the economic self-sufficiency of Louisiana women through increased access to education and training and the removal of barriers to women's advancement such as unequal pay, childcare, transportation, and teen pregnancy.

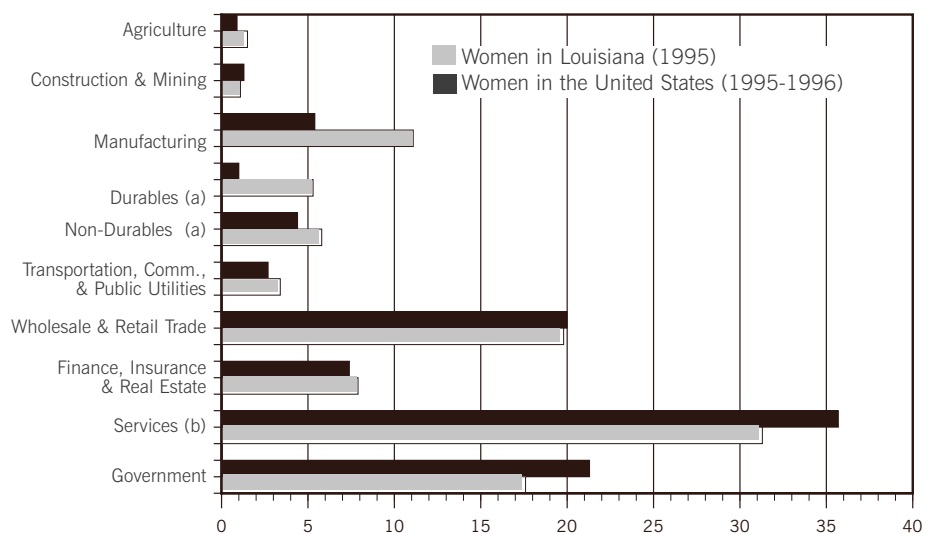
Recommendations

Reinforce and encourage stricter enforcement of our state's position with respect to the requirement of agencies and contractors with the state to abide by all applicable State and Federal policies regarding employment discrimination.

Launch a public service campaign in cooperation with the Louisiana Public Broadcasting Network and/or other public and private media organizations to educate the public on topics such as equal employment, wage discrimination, and sexual harassment.

Encourage the Department of Labor to emphasize discrimination education and pay equity information in its workshops and printed materials for both public and private entities.

Distribution of Women Across Industries in Louisiana and the United States



(a) Durables & non-durables are included in manufacturing.

(b) Private household workers are included in services.

Issue 2: JOB TRAINING

Given the persistent male-female pay gap in Louisiana and the high rate of poverty for women (21.3 percent vs. 13.7 percent nationally), we suspect women continue to be directed to educational and job training programs that perpetuate ideas about women's work but do not lead to higher paying or non-traditional jobs for women.

For example, nearly 20 percent of employed women in Louisiana are in low-paying service jobs, vs. 17.5 percent nationally, and over 44 percent are employed in technical, sales and administrative support vs. 41.4 percent nationally.

It follows that fewer Louisiana women are employed in the higher paying managerial and professional occupations than are women nationally (28.4 percent vs. 30.3 percent).

And lastly, Louisiana women are less likely to graduate from high school, as reflected in the state's rank of 42nd in the level of women's educational attainment.

Objective

The Commission's aim is for Louisiana women to participate in the full range of education and job training programs which improve employment opportunities and wages.

Recommendations

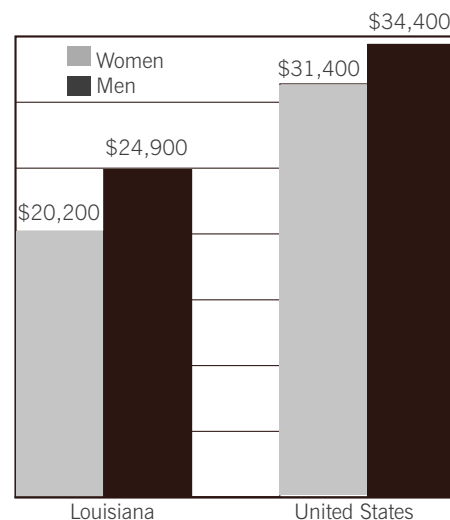
Request the Louisiana Workforce Commission conduct a questionnaire survey of women participants in all publicly funded job training programs and share the results with the Office of Women's Services and the appropriate state agencies for continuing improvement of their programs.

- Highlight in each congressional district a model training program based on the above information that emphasizes women's non-traditional, higher-wage employment and promote to female customers by June 30, 2002.

Review the Unified State Plan for the Workforce Investment Act to strengthen provisions relating to services and programs for Displaced Homemakers and single parent households. Include the Governor's Office of Women's Services as a representative of the Women's Commission in those efforts.

Review higher education teacher-training strategies to ascertain their effectiveness in encouraging girls and women to pursue non-traditional economic areas of activity and study, especially math, science and technology.

**Median Annual Earnings of Women and Men
Employed Full-Time/Year-Round in Louisiana and
the United States, 1995 (1997 Dollars)**



• • • • • • • • • • •

Issue 3: CHILD CARE

Since the 1970s, the most significant growth in the paid labor force has been in the participation of women with young children. In Louisiana, some 63 percent of women in the labor force have children under age 18, and 58.3 percent have children under six years of age.

As noted in the results of the public hearings, many mothers report problems finding affordable and conveniently located quality child care. Child care costs are a significant barrier to employment for many women, and child care costs use up a large percentage of earnings.

According to the Children's Defense Fund's 1999 report, low-income families face a crisis with child care. Nationally, one-third of children of working mothers are poor despite their mothers' employment or would be poor if their mothers were not employed. Despite the low wages paid to child care workers, in most all states the average cost of child care is more than one year's public college tuition.

Child Care Assistance is a little known and hard to obtain benefit in Louisiana. Women receiving public assistance who were surveyed as part of the Southern University of New Orleans Welfare Reform Research Project report an increased need for this assistance in order to be employed. While 48 percent have a child under age five, all on public assistance are mandated to be in training and work-readiness programs, but less than 14 percent have Child Care Assistance vouchers.

Objective

The Commission aims to make full employment possible for mothers with dependent children by providing access to affordable, quality childcare.

"I'm a single divorced mother raising two daughters without any public assistance because it's too hard to get. You can't find any hours in your day to go seek any assistance. I don't think I should be obligated to be married to make ends meet. I don't think I should have to work three or four jobs to make ends meet. We're strong women here in Louisiana. Most of us run our own houses. It frazzles our nerves."

Vo-tech student,
Alexandria Commission hearings, 2001

Recommendations

Provide a tax credit to businesses and organizations that offer licensed child-care and/or other after-school care as an employee benefit or provide other options such as flexible spending accounts for child or dependent care.

Expand Childcare Assistance by maximizing available federal resources including but not limited to unexpended Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds as allowed, and restoring state general fund dollars to be used as a match to draw down available federal funds.

Request all state agencies and contractors to identify by December 31, 2001, family-friendly work practices, such as on-site day and after school care, flexible work schedules, or other strategies to keep women with dependents working, and forward this information to the Governor's Office of Women's Services so that family-friendly models can be identified and promoted within the state.

Issue 4: TRANSPORTATION

Though no state comparisons on the availability of public or private transportation relevant to women exist, the testimony of women at each of the public hearings suggests access to transportation creates a more significant barrier to women's full employment than to men's. For example, there is no transportation system in Monroe, or Lafourche and St. Tammany Parishes. Alternatives to public transportation, such as hitch-hiking or car ownership, are less likely to be used by women for reasons of safety and cost.

The following excerpts from testimonies at the Commission's 2001 Hearings provide an example of the problems created by lack of transportation.

A Baton Rouge resident testified that she had a child eligible and enrolled for Juvenile Services of Baton Rouge, but she could not provide transportation to the program for her child.

A Lake Charles resident said she hitchhiked to the Lake Charles public hearing, just like she hitchhikes to work since her truck broke down. She's working in Calcasieu Parish after leaving a violent home. Without a car, she was laid off from one job because of absenteeism. Lack of transportation also caused her to get laid off from another. She's hitchhiking and/or catching cabs to get to work. Still, she says her current problems are better than taking abuse.

A social service professional in Monroe testified, "I see transportation for women seeking to make a better life as a major problem. Many of our constituents have to depend on friends or family to get anywhere. There is no public transportation system in our district, so women who have no transportation cannot apply for jobs, get to work, take care of routine errands, even come to the government office to fill out a release form. To help these women attain a better quality of life, they must have some dependable means of mobility first."

A Baton Rouge professional complained that women who need government assistance may see that assistance get cut if they own a car. "They must get rid of the car before they can get the assistance. If they get rid of the car, they can't get to the food stamps. So that's a barrier you find, especially in trying to service women with children."

A Baton Rouge skills training and employment center owner for low-income women says some women can't keep a job because they don't have transportation to work.

Objective

The Commission aims to open and maintain opportunities for employment for women by creating/improving public systems and other means of transportation.

Recommendations

Convene a task force to study public transportation systems in Louisiana and models in other states so as to quantify the transportation issues and possible solutions for working-age women.

Utilize the state transportation study to develop a state plan to:

- receive appropriate federal and public assistance to address this problem in a comprehensive way;

- encourage the creation of public-private partnerships, especially the creation of small businesses, to meet the transportation needs of women.

Provide a tax credit to businesses and organizations that :

- Offer as an employee benefit transportation to/from work or programs to make car ownership possible and,
- Develop transportation systems in areas where none exists.

Issue 5: TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancy impacts the health, educational achievements, and future economic self-sufficiency of women. In spite of the declining teenage birth rate in Louisiana, the rates remain high relative to other states, i.e. 42nd in the nation.

Forty-two percent of all births in Louisiana are to unmarried women, and among African Americans, 72.4 percent of all births are to unmarried women. The national statistics are 32.2 percent and 69.9 percent, respectively.

Testimony at the Commission's 2001 hearings related the lack of, and need for, educational information about reproduction and prevention.

Objective

The Commission's aim is to increase the female high school graduation rate and young women's economic self-sufficiency by decreasing teenage pregnancy rates.

"Inasmuch as teen pregnancy is a major problem, when will sex education be more available?"

Monroe Commission Hearings 2001



Recommendations

Strengthen the state's abstinence programs by including information about reproductive health education that will reduce unwanted pregnancies and result in more successful health outcomes and reproductive choices throughout the lifecycle.

Support programs such as the Get R.E.A.L. Campaign, the Baby Think It Over Program, and the Fatherhood Pilot Program, and expand these into long-term statewide initiatives to promote responsible parenting.

Reevaluate Louisiana's sex education statute that prohibits the teaching of sex education to students below the seventh grade level (third grade in Orleans Parish) and develop curriculum that introduces sex education in science courses. See Issue 11: Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

Issue 6: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Women entrepreneurs play a leading role in driving America's economic growth. They employ one in four U.S. workers and employ, on average, more women than do male-owned companies. Though women-owned businesses are the fastest sector of growth in each of the 50 states, and women in Louisiana own approximately one-third of all Louisiana firms, between 1987 and 1992, the number of women-owned businesses in Louisiana grew at a rate considerably lower than the national average (37.6 percent in Louisiana v. 43.1 percent nationally). Women still face formidable obstacles to starting and growing their own businesses.

Objective

The Commission aims to increase access to capital and information to help more women gain economic self-sufficiency through self-employment and small business initiatives.



Recommendations

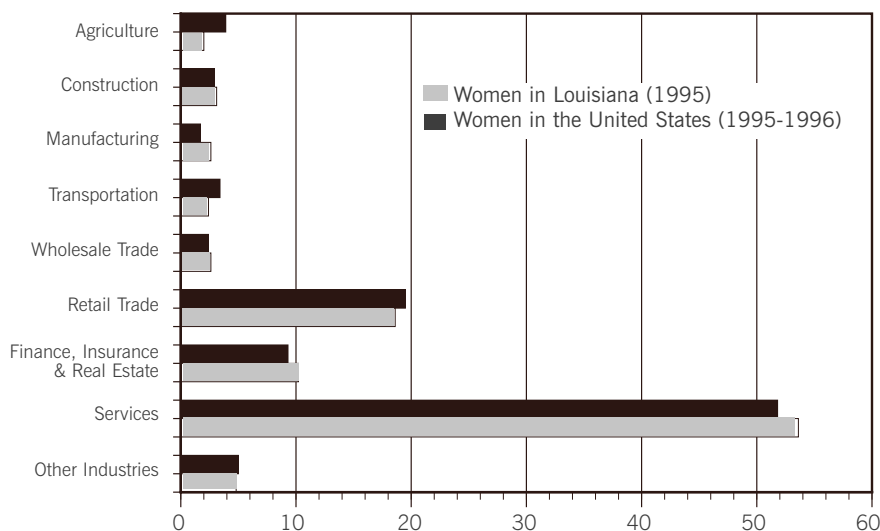
Implement state policy to facilitate micro-enterprise development and small business development for women through the creation of a micro-loan program, which fills the gap for business loans under \$10,000.

Compile a directory of services for potential and existing women business owners of Small Business Development Centers, financial institutions, and other small business assistance organizations to encourage and educate women about these services.

Undertake an economic literacy campaign and adopt high school curricula to promote basic money management education for women and girls.

Request that departments and/or agencies within the Governor's Cabinet develop appropriate statewide educational and motivational campaigns to build entrepreneurial attitudes among women and girls, especially in non-traditional fields.

Distribution of Women-Owned Firms Across Industries in Louisiana and the United States, 1992



Issue 7: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

According to the data from the Welfare Reform Research Project at Southern University New Orleans:

- In 1999 less than half—40.7 percent—of those receiving TANF in 1998 were still doing so.
- Of the 59.3 percent (or 206 respondents) no longer receiving assistance, more than half—54 percent—were discontinued for involuntary reasons, such as reaching the two-year time limit or failing to comply with program requirements.
- Only 28.1 percent of those leaving welfare (28.1% of 206, which is 58 women) left through employment. Their average hourly wage was only \$6.21, and most were making only minimum wage.

The currently legislated TANF time-limits, in which cash benefits are denied to families if the parent has received benefits for at least 24 months during a prior 60-month period, restricts women's opportunities to participate in educational and job-training programs sufficient to enable their employment at jobs paying better than minimum wage.

Because they are unable to firmly establish themselves in the two-year period, this “on-again, off-again” program maintains their dependence on the state rather than fostering economic independence. Moreover, eliminating the two-year time limit would reduce administrative work and costs.

Another critical issue that has been brought to the Commission's attention is the decentralized and fragmented nature of services to women that require a woman seeking services to go from one office to another to another. The needs of women on public assistance are most often multiple and complex, requiring an approach that considers the whole woman along with all of the responsibilities she has for her family.

Percent of Total Population, Medicare and Medicaid Recipients Enrolled in Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) in Louisiana and the United States, 1996

	Louisiana	United States
Total Population	4,351,000	265,284,000
Percent of Total Population Enrolled in HMOs	11.0	22.0
Percent of Total Population Receiving Medicare	13.4	14.0
Percent of Medicare Recipients Enrolled in HMOs	9.0	13.0
Percent of Total Population Receiving Medicaid	18.1	13.4
Percent of Medicaid Recipients Enrolled in HMOs	5.6	40.1

Objective

The Commission's aim is to enable women needing public assistance to become self-sufficient when they leave such programs.

Recommendations

Extend the time limits on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) eligibility to the full 60 months allowed under federal rules so as to enable women's participation in needed literacy, GED, or other long-term educational and training programs, and seek ways that educational and training programs can be combined with required work activities.

Work in cooperation with the Department of Education, the Board of Regents, and other entities to develop a program to allow TANF recipients, regardless of age, to access educational courses in literacy, English as a second language, adult basic education, GED, vocational/technical and secondary education as well as pre-employability training, and seek ways these can count as work activities. Further, with unspent federal TANF funds, consider expanding education and training to include post-secondary education.

Conduct a feasibility study of adopting a case management approach to assisting low and no income women in addressing all the services they require in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency. As a long-range goal, case management should include a “one-stop shop” for all social services, Medicaid and other health programs, job-training, educational programs, legal services, referrals for domestic/relationship violence, and so forth.

Issue 8: HEALTH EDUCATION

There is an overwhelming amount of data, including the 1999 national report by ReliaStar Financial, that ranks Louisiana as the least healthy state in the nation based on disease rate, access to health care, occupational safety and disability, crime rate, motor vehicle-death rate, high unemployment, poor access by consumers to primary care, high rates of heart disease, and other causes of mortality that result in premature death.

In particular, the data reflect the inaccessibility of primary health care to most women and girls, high rates of violence perpetrated against women and girls, and women's high mortality rate.

Louisiana women rank 48th in the nation in the percent who are covered by health insurance. With less access to health care than their counterparts in other states, Louisiana women die younger than other American women.

What is striking to the Women's Commission, both in reviewing the data and listening to testimony from residents, is the large extent to which women and girls of all ages are unable to access and utilize comprehensive primary, preventive, and specialty care services, due to the lack of education, insurance, funding, and/or transportation.

Objective

The Commission's aim is to develop and implement a strategic, educational campaign to address the unmet health needs of women of all ages in Louisiana.



Recommendations

Empower the Office of Women's Services and/or other appropriate agencies to inventory women's health care services in Louisiana and keep this information current for distribution to legislators, policy makers, individuals, health care providers and all stakeholders in decision-making regarding health care in Louisiana.

Encourage the appropriate state public health departments to create an Advisory Council for Women's Health in each parish of Louisiana, where the participants help the state identify and direct public and private services to the unmet health needs of women, especially women between the ages of 40 and 65 years.

Establish a health-dedicated web site, linked to INFO Louisiana and maintained by a coordinating state agency to facilitate women's knowledge of and access to available health services in Louisiana.

- Information to be included on such a web site includes free clinics, health fairs, health care laws, transportation to health care, community-based health care centers, services dedicated to women's preventive health, charity hospitals, mental health clinics, public health units, state developmental centers, substances abuse programs, federally qualified and rural health clinics, school based health care, home health care, elder care, adult/senior and child health insurance programs, nutrition, reproductive health care, services for women by age category, dental care, eye care, hearing services, services for special needs children, disability assistance, independent living programs, family and domestic violence programs, immunization programs, shelters for women and women with children, rape crisis and sexual violence intervention programs, and other health-related services.

Issue 9: DOMESTIC/RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Although a statewide task force concerned with Domestic Violence is studying this issue, the seriousness of this issue for the life and economic well-being of women, along with the prevalence of women who spoke at the hearings about relationship violence, requires us to include recommendations for assisting women who are victims of violence.

Louisiana had the 2nd highest per capita homicide rate for women in 1999, according to the Violence Policy Center's 2000 report.

The number of women who say they are stalked in Louisiana is more than double the national average.

Further, while violence occurs in families throughout all socioeconomic levels, our high poverty levels increase the risk of domestic/relationship violence. For example, national research estimates that between 20 and 30 percent of the women receiving public assistance are currently victims of domestic/relationship violence (Raphael and Haennicke, Taylor Institute, published by the Urban Institute, 1999).

Objective

The Commission's aim is to increase women's safety by reducing the homicide rate and the rate of relationship/domestic violence.

Recommendations

Develop an integrated, statewide strategy that treats domestic/relationship violence as a public health issue, and coordinates social, legal, and health services among shelters, hospital and medical personnel, mental health providers, welfare and social service offices, police and sheriffs, attorneys, and judges.

Empower the Office of Women's Services, the appropriate state agencies, and the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement to collaborate with existing statewide domestic violence coalitions to develop a public education campaign to help individuals identify, prevent, and/or encourage appropriate intervention in incidents of domestic/relationship violence.

Encourage the Department of Social Services to work with statewide domestic violence coalitions in drafting appropriate TANF programs and services that enhance the safety and economic self-sufficiency of victims of domestic/relationship violence, and offer the "Family Violence Option", i.e. good cause waivers from program requirements to provide for women's safety, such as exemptions from work or job search requirements and cooperation with child support enforcement.

Develop more reliable means for the Department of Social Services to identify victims of domestic/relationship violence such as using a list of behavioral indicators (have you been slapped, kicked, beaten, etc., repeatedly, etc.), and make this information completely confidential, so that women feel safe in disclosing.

Select and/or train specialists in regional social service offices who are linked to community agencies that address violence against women and who can act as resources for caseworkers and clients reporting domestic/relationship violence.

Allow Temporary Restraining Orders to be obtained by never-married women who are seeking protection from former boyfriends, and encourage municipalities to grant fee exemptions for poor women.

Empower the Office of Women's Services to educate communities in which they fund Family Violence programs about the locations and services provided for battered women and their children.

Establish a statewide toll-free crisis line to aid survivors of domestic/relationship violence, and require all medical establishments to report incidences of weapon-related violence (the use of any instrument used to inflict harm).

Issue 10: BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER

The Women's Preventive Health Programs/Office of Public Health/Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals is attempting to address the disparities existing among Louisiana's women in gaining services to prevent and fight breast and cervical cancer, but more needs to be done.

Objective

The Commission aims to reduce deaths from breast and cervical cancer.

Recommendations

Empower the appropriate state department to determine whether R.S. 17:275, which requires all public junior and senior high schools to provide instruction to all female students in the proper procedure for breast self-examination and the need for an annual Pap test to detect cervical cancer, is being uniformly implemented in Louisiana and to pursue appropriate actions to accomplish this legislative mandate.

Participate in the federal matching grant program that allows women with breast cancer to automatically qualify for Medicaid.

Issue 11: SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

Louisiana has dangerously high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among our citizens. We have the second highest incidence of syphilis in the country, the 10th highest incidence of gonorrhea, the 11th highest incidence of chlamydia. In addition, these rates are reported to be increasing among women and girls, and studies indicate that women, especially women of color, are the fastest growing population for new HIV/AIDS cases.

Objective

The Commission aims to decrease the incidence of STDs and HIV/AIDS related deaths among our citizens.

Recommendations

Establish a public education campaign, including grade-specific curriculums, targeting girls and women of all ages with information on how to prevent, detect and treat STDs.

Identify funding streams and implement extended Medicaid coverage to women who are HIV-infected, since current coverage is only available to AIDS-infected women.

Seek and support legislation for private insurance companies in Louisiana to cover contraceptives as a prescription drug, when prescribed for medical uses such as hormone therapy.

Seek and support legislation that allows Medicaid coverage for all prescribed, legitimate medical uses of contraceptives, such as regulation of hormones.



As this report documents, Louisiana women and their children are among the poorest and the least healthy in our nation.

A partnership among our government agencies and with community organizations is paramount for progress.

15